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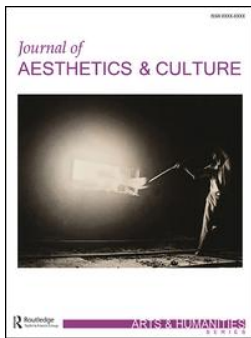
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The world goes modern: new globalized framings of the postwar era in the contemporary exhibitions *After Year Zero* and *The World Goes Pop*

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Abstract

The article analyzes the contemporary art historical focus on *multiple modernities* through two significant exhibitions: *After Year Zero* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin 2013/ Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw 2015 and *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London (2015). These different exhibitions are aimed at re-reading the post-1945 era in a global context, discussing how arts and culture responded to a global modernity. The article emphasizes the overlapping interests in this by academic art history and criticism as well as museal and curatorial efforts and discusses the idea of curatorial research in these different approaches.



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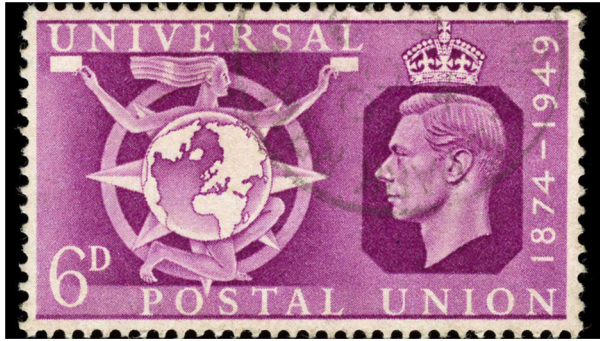
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As subject to musealization the arts and culture of the postwar era of the 1950s and 1960s are currently reassessed from being a too well-known and slightly conformed in-between age easily overshadowed by the WW2-years and the notorious

late-1960s to a past that the present is eager to engage with. Remarkably, this implies a shifting perspective from hegemonic Western modernism to a *multiple modernities* view emphasizing different cultural narratives of modernity as characterizing

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The Otolith Group, “In the Year of the Quite Sun,” 2013. Courtesy of the artists.

the era and the configuration of artistic modernism. This new framing of the recent past is carried out in academic discourses as well as in museal and curatorial practice—and, as the case studies of this article show, not just in small-scale, experimental formats, but in major presentations at large museums aimed at a wider audience as well, profoundly testifying to the interest in the era.

Two recent exhibitions aimed at reassessing of postwar modern culture in a global perspective are:

1. *After Year Zero* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, and Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2015): an experimental curatorial research-based exhibition discussing the relations between Europe and the new nations in Africa and Asia after 1945 (“Year Zero”), combining archive material from the postwar-era with contemporary artworks and research (www.artmuseum.pl/en/wystawy/after-year-zero).
2. *The World Goes Pop* at Tate Modern (2015–2016). A large-scale presentation at the popular Tate Modern museum in London telling “the global story of pop art from Latin America to Asia, and from Europe to the Middle East,” “showing how different cultures and countries responded to the movement” (www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop).

Method and use of theory

My article will discuss these cases and different types of exhibitions (experimental curatorial research with activist agenda vs. “blockbuster” pre-

sentation) as a reassessment of the postwar era of the 1950s and 1960s in detail as well as overall perspective. After a short introduction of the new approaches forming the expanded field of modernism, including the *multiple modernities* theory of Schmuël Eisenstadt and its implementation in art history, as in the work of Kobena Mercer, I will analyze the two exhibitions. I will try to identify the curatorial agenda drawing on sources from the exhibition itself, its surrounding “paratext”¹ (accompanying communication and promotion) as well as the critical reflection following the exhibitions in conferences and articles, and evaluate how this intent is actually carried out in the exhibitions through comparative exhibition analyses. Recent thinking about curatorial research stresses that the role of the curator is not to produce exhibitions, but that the exhibition is one outcome of a research process (Sheik 2014). The topic of curatorial research and the *research exhibition* has tended to be aimed at a specific scene at the art world of experimental venues and a specialist audience of well-informed insiders. Comparing a project from this scene (*After Year Zero* at the HKW) with an exhibition associated with a different sphere (*The World Goes Pop* at the well-attended Tate Modern) will contribute to a discussion of research through exhibitions. The exhibition-focused analysis will not go into in-depth analysis of the individual art works or perform research in the historical material itself (as in drawing any original conclusions about the artistic responses to de-colonialization or the global spread of pop art, as done in the exhibitions).

The questions of modernity, multiple or singular, are of course also a large topic beyond the reach of this case and is thus briefly introduced. It should also be noted that this is an ongoing and current topic and that the newness of these exhibitions will come to an end (at the time of writing one of them has already closed) and other relevant activities might probably appear (for instance, Haus der Kunst in Munich will present *Postwar—Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965* curated by Okwui Enwezor, Ulrich Wilmes and Katy Siegel in October 2016). To stress the current relevance of this particular presence of the past I refer to a range of exhibitions, studies, and activities. These are of course limited by my knowledge and could supposedly be

complemented by many others as well. The reason to select the two case exhibitions is not to promote them, but use them as easily identifiable manifestations of a broader field. I have not been associated with any of the exhibitions or institutions behind, and have thus no special information. My perspective and method is not least the exhibition visit—a method of participatory observation following the way the exhibitions are intended to be read and experienced, supplemented with available contextual material and readings. Both exhibitions have been followed with substantial catalogue publications (see bibliography) and related academic conferences: before *The World Goes Pop* the conference Global Pop Symposium was held in March 2013² (video-documented online) and the conference Global Modernisms was held at HKW in October 2015, including a project presentation of *After Year Zero*—events underscoring the convergence of the academic and curatorial interest in the field (I have attended this conference). This should also stress the fact that exhibitions are important venues of research—and also that the exhibition of historical material is not just a passive act, compared to presenting contemporary art, but can form an active contribution to the current debate and give new perspectives as well.

New ways into the postwar era

Until a few years ago the arts and culture of the post-war era of the 1950s and 1960s was not in high demand, neither among avant-garde specialists or museum audiences. The stakes were much higher for presenting art of the inter-war period as the formative beginning of an experimental practice situated in a mythologized context of modern, yet rich in traditional metropolises. A tendency seen from Pontus Hultén's series of exhibitions at Centre Pompidou in the 1970s: *Paris–Berlin*, *Paris–Moscow*, *Paris–New York*, and *Paris–Paris* up to exhibitions like *Avantgarde i dansk og europæisk kunst* (Statens Museum for Kunst 2003), *Inventing Abstraction 1910–1925* (Museum of Modern Art, New York 2012) and the core collection of many museums of modern art. Also additions to the canon could be added when dealing with the pre-war era, as in *Central European Avant-Gardes*

1910–1930 showing the prolific art scenes in Central and Eastern Europe (Los Angeles County Museum 2002) and *Women of the Avant-Garde 1920–1940* presenting the works of eight women artists (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art 2012) underscoring the image of progressivity and openness. On the other hand, for generations of artists, art historians and critics (from roughly 1965 to 2000) the postwar era and its hegemonic “high modernism” formed a static antipole to contemporary art—a concept deliberately separating art since the 1960s from “modern art” as pointed out by Terry Smith and Peter Osborne. Postwar modern was dogmatically formalist and American- and Eurocentric, whereas contemporary art was pluralistic and globalized. Least of all, the era in itself and its leitmotifs of cultural and aesthetical modernity would be considered attractive.

This is obviously changing. Recent exhibitions highlight the postwar era and its modernism with confidence in titles like *Radically Modern. Urban Planning in and Architecture in 1960s Berlin* (Berlinische Galerie 2015), *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia* (Walker Art Center 2015) and *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernism and Modernity* (MACBA 2009–10). The success of book titles from historian Tony Judt's *Postwar* (2005) to architecture critic Owen Hatherley's *Militant Modernism* (2009) also point to the subject of the postwar era as an advantage rather than a turn-off, not to talk of retro-fascination of anything *mid-century modern* throughout the popular culture, where the postwar era are at the core of the collective imagination from subcultures to cultural festivals.³ For instance, The Classic Car Boot Sales regularly gathers over 100 vintage vehicles and traders at London's South Bank close to Tate Modern.

In academic studies of the arts a reassessment of modernism and the postwar era also has settled. Where modernism and postwar era arts were previously almost solely associated with a Western dominance and the notorious transfer of power from Paris to New York, a whole field of study is growing around global modernisms recognizing the presence and formative significance of modernist culture far from the Western metropolises. An important example of this is the series *Annotating Art's Histories: Cross Cultural Perspectives in Visual*

Arts edited by British art historian Kobena Mercer consisting of the volumes *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (2005), *Discrepant Abstraction* (2006), *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures* (2007) and *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers* (2008). According to Mercer, the aim of this project is to counter-balance the “de-historized outlook that tends to identify cross-cultural aspects of the visual arts with the limited shelf-life of ‘the contemporary’,”⁴ and the way “‘the contemporary’ so often take precedence over ‘the historical’ as the privileged focus for examining matters of difference and identity.”⁵ In this lies an ambition to correct the prevalent perception of the cosmopolitan contemporary versus the monocultural modernism of the past. Throughout the series this is carried out by studies on how “modernist attitudes took shape in different national and cultural environments” in a “dynamic interplay between different cultures”⁶ breaking with the conventional center–periphery perspective.

This multicultural focus on modernism relates to the theoretical perspective called “multiple modernities” with the concept of Israeli sociologist Schmuël Eisenstadt.⁷ In the summing up of sociologist Peter Wagner, Eisenstadt’s multiple modernities meant that “the encounter of other civilizations with Western modernity did not lead to the mere diffusion of the western model but rather to the proliferation of varieties of modernity generated by the encounter of different ‘cultural programmes’, which had consolidated much earlier, with western ideas and practices.”⁸ The exact configuration and actual output of this macro-perspective is widely discussed. For instance, the notion of “cultural programmes” by Eisenstadt could connote separated, parallel trajectories as the form of modernity. Such a view of parallel modernities is opposed by Mercer, who sees “mutual entanglement of western and non-western practices” as modernity and modernism’s configuration,⁹ expressed in numerous art practices expressing modernity as well as a site- and culture-specific perspective.

Art historian Keith (Moxey) also discusses modernity and its possible multiple in the chapter “Is Modernity Multiple?” in the book *Visual Time: The Image in History* (2013). According to Moxey modernity “and its artistic partner, modernism” has “always been tied to the star of temporal progress”¹⁰ and are teleological to the

self-understanding of Western superiority. Thus, multiple modernities is an oxymoron and logical contradiction. Modernism can operate only by excluding non-western works, which carry another temporality. Moxey argues that this changed after modernism, where a contemporaneity more compatible with the multiple has taken over¹¹ and where a more plausible “multiple contemporaneities” can “draw attention to the unequal speeds at which time unfolds in different locations.”

Despite this skepticism re-drawing the map of modernism has become a characteristic tendency in art historical studies, to a certain degree breaking with what is commonly settled as the history of modernism and postwar art. One could almost suggest that after a confident self-representation of Western modernism culminating in new museums from MoMA and Guggenheim to Moderna Museet and Louisiana and then a critical and curatorial backlash in the following era—in both cases dominated by personal commitment and insider roles—time is exceedingly ripe for sobering and open-minded analysis of (postwar) modernism. Like British historian Dominic Sandbrook (born 1974) present his approach to write about the notorious sixties as a younger historian:

As probably the first historian to write about the period whose earliest memories only just encompass the years before Thatcherism, I have very little interest in celebrating an exaggerated golden age of hedonism and liberation, or in condemning an equally exaggerating era of moral degradation and national decline. What this book argues is that the British experience in the 1960s was much more complicated, diverse and contradictory than it has often been given credit for.¹²

Besides this sobering view from the distance, correcting and criticizing some of the perceived characteristics of the era, current interest in postwar culture also seems to be nurtured by a desire to recognize and produce characteristic images, as in retro cultures cherished “Mid-century modern.” The reassessment of postwar arts and culture in exhibitions and other museal practices is connected to a certain impact and popular appeal, often including such fashionable material as design, commodities, and popular culture. It has become fashionable to exhibit 1960s brutalism

(with accompanying vintage souvenirs in the gift shop) and popular designers characteristic of their period as *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* at the Barbican Arts Centre in London 2015.

Locally specific and “other” manifestations of modern culture are also increasingly coveted exhibition material. For instance, a successful exhibition of the Brazilian *Tropicália* movement toured Berlin (in the HKW), London, New York, and Chicago in 2006. A curated display of the collection of the Centre Pompidou in 2013, *Modernités plurielles, 1905–1970/Multiple Modernities, 1905–1970* also emphasized the global spread of modernism covering “all continents” for an “enriched overview of the history of art” in a leading museum in the historical capital of European art and modernism.

As these examples indicate, the topic of *multiple modernities* are explored in a field between academic research, historically oriented museum exhibitions, and experimental curatorial efforts. The new interest is distinct, but do also carry different positions and evaluations and there is no common agenda or “school” of global modernism. As Okwui Enwesor once stated, “modernism has many streams that do not all empty into the same basin.”¹³ Along the lines of Mercer I find it necessary to rethink postwar art history from a singular and predetermined story of modernism all too easy to break with, to a much more “complicated, diverse and contradictory” image the more in touch with our present state of affairs and contemporary art. I also find it important to state that geography is not the only factor here: modernism should also be seen as entangled with science, industry, popular culture and ideas of the past as well as the present and future. A single focus on geography, as a multiple modernities focus has tended towards, is not necessarily productive and do often end in a listing of singular occurrences of a phenomenon, say cubist painting, without necessary contextualization or overview (Mercer’s anthologies do admittedly have this character sometimes). The challenge is thus curatorial—to create a comprehensible, yet nuanced survey of the past in the present with the right questions and tensions.

This brings us to the case examples, to further analyze the new interest in postwar art and its role today.



Interior view of archive material from *After Year Zero*. Photos: Kristian Handberg.

After Year Zero. Geographies of Collaboration, HKW and Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw: The research exhibition and the past in the present

After Year Zero. Geographies of Collaboration was presented at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin in (2013) and, in a slightly different and enlarged form, at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2015. The exhibition comprised of works by contemporary artists and (documentary) filmmakers as well as historical documents and other archive material relating to the political and cultural organization of the world in the post-1945 era (“After year zero”). These various practices, gathered by curators Annett Busch and Anselm Franke, were exploring issues of post-colonialism and emancipation struggles as central features of postwar culture and how a “Color Curtain” between the First and the Third world was as powerful a reality as the Iron Curtain between the communist and capitalist world.

Besides these restrictive conditions, the exhibition illustrated the political and cultural agency and forms of resistance growing in the Third world countries in the era, in art as well as in other “modern” practices from architecture and to recorded music and magazines.

Hereby the exhibition clearly asserts itself into a *multiple modernities* context, actively and critically addressing the content and configuration of the concept in its activities in the form of the newly proclaimed territory of the *research exhibition*: a meeting of arts, critical debate and experimental knowledge production.

The exhibition allegedly developed out of a “series of workshops and nomadic discussions held in Algiers, Dakar, Johannesburg, Paris, and Brussels”¹⁴ concerning the relationship between Europe and Africa. These meetings could be seen as enacting “the geographies of collaboration” in the title and highlights the processual character of the project. One result of these was to set the historical event of the Bandung Conference in 1955 as the starting point for the exhibition. This event hosted by the Indonesian President Sukarno was the first international conference of mostly newly-independent countries from Africa and Asia (it was called an “Afro-Asian Conference” even though Tito’s Yugoslavia also participated) pronouncing a declaration of solidarity and Non-alignment in the Cold-war dominated political landscape. The Bandung Conference is given an outsider position in the Western collective memory and historicization of the postwar era and could be seen as repressed or at least neglected. However, some historians advocate a more global perspective on events like the Cold War, as Odd Arne (Westad) in the influential account *The Global Cold War* (2005), where the Bandung conference is discussed as a key moment, even if the aftermath was blurry and more potentiality than reality. Treating this historically complex and important, if unknown, matter is a serious task that will have to introduce the audience for the events at all, as well as its consequences, thus putting the research exhibition and its ability to stage awareness and critical reflection to a test.

In the western context the postwar era following the “Year Zero” (*Stunde Null*) of the end of WW2 is (apart from the omnipresent devastation and burdening memory of the recent atrocities) associated with a new beginning promoting a world

order based on humanism at almost universal level. In the fast-settling perspective of the Cold War this was obviously politicized, for instance through the activities of the CIA-supported Congress for Cultural Freedom, and associated with “modern” values of progress, modernization and nation state. As a characteristic by anthropologist James C. Scott the postwar “high modernism” (not in art but in political and cultural self-understanding) meant:

the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, and rational planning of ideal social orders under standardized conditions of knowledge and production The modernism that resulted was ... positivistic, technocratic, and rationalistic at the same time as it was imposed as the work of an elite avant-garde of planners, artists, architects, critics The “modernization” of European economies proceeded apace, while the whole thrust of international politics and trade was justified as bringing a benevolent and progressive “modernization process” to a backward Third World. (Anthropologist James C. Scott in Westad (2006), 397)

It is a contested question how this relates to the world outside of the West or the Cold War East–West. Voices in the postcolonial critique will argue that universalism based on Western values contributed to sustain the “color curtain” (in the words of author Richard Wright in his report from Bandung) with consequences for today, where “the major obstacle blocking new openings are the ruins of old ideas: progress, modernization, nation state—ideas that continue to lie at the foundation of the European order, but at the same time retain an inextricable historical link with colonialism and exclusion”¹⁵ according to the curators of the exhibition. Then, why not, well into the 21st century where modernism has become past, leave that altogether and think forward through the supply of contemporary aesthetics and as Moxey suggest think in *multiple contemporaneities*? Because it is necessary to start a “dialogue based on alternative narratives” (ibid.) and “gather the traces of alternative political projects, structures and networks of contacts that emerged in Africa and in migrant environments” (Ibid.). The project thus has the activist, memory political agenda to use the representation of the past and through collaboration “share the same map or memory” to create “horizons for a common future,”¹⁶ according

to curator Anselm Franke. This is done through a cultural historical re-reading of the post-WW2 modernity (“After Year Zero”), not in Europe, but in Africa and Asia, where it is not the “rescue of Western civilization” that is at stake, but on the contrary the ability to stand out of the shadows of the Western hegemony that the colonial status had hitherto casted.

The kinds of cultural forms *After Year Zero* investigates, like magazines, documentary films, records, postal stamps, architecture and works of art, are decidedly *modern*, albeit in a locally versioned form and provenance. Examples include the postal stamps of African nations expressing new-found national identity exhibited by the Otolith Group in video and exhibition or the African Jazz recordings presented by Max Annas and Gary Minkley. Rather than depicting modernist aesthetics and media as coming from the outside, the local adaption and use of these are the main impression.



From Otolith Group: “In the Year of the Quiet Sun,” 2013. Photo: Kristian Handberg.

However, it is not the material objects that form the main body of *After Year Zero*. The first section of the exhibition (this article is based on viewing the Warsaw edition in June 2015) comprised of a series of display cases with a largely text-based account of the historical theme of the exhibition in the Bandung Conference. An ordered, introductory rendition of this significant, yet in the common knowledge unknown event merged into a more collage-like form of fragments and set changes. Here the political event of Bandung was

complemented a broader scope of material related to postcolonialism in the postwar era, like a registration of the presence of modernist architecture in Ghana.

The presentation and introduction of material, using a strikingly traditional museum communication with large bodies of text, Xeroxed photographs and documents, could be read as an inclusive opening of the topic, but also as thematizing the research itself asking questions to and even potentially deconstructing the presented narrative. As an experimental construction formed through workshops and a combination of contemporary artistic works, documentary films and archival material *After Year Zero* would be obvious to perceive as a *research exhibition* or *curatorial research*—an increasingly recognized territory in the landscape of contemporary art. Curator and writer Simon Sheikh comments in a recent essay on the idea of the research exhibition and curatorial research (Sheikh 2014). According to Sheikh, the much-coveted idea of the curatorial in general could be posited as a form of research, as curatorial work does not necessarily mean “exhibition making,” but “a specific mode of research that may or may not take on the spatial and temporal form of the exhibition.”¹⁷ To define the specific system of knowledge production that is curatorial research, Sheikh deduces two different types of researching contained in the English term “research.” The first is *recherche* associated by the practice of the reporter with looking for sources, witnesses and stories and checking these for accuracy. This factual type of research is present in any exhibition making, even if rarely noticed and authored and “placed lower in the hierarchy of creative work,” and would arguably increase with the size the exhibition and institution. The second meaning of research is *forschung*, implying a scientific model of research operating through hypotheses and propositions. This gives emphasis to the process itself and “implies the spatial production of specific sites for research”—characteristics pointing in the direction of the *research exhibition*: a new concept associated with contemporary curatorial practice, where the exhibition “is not only a vehicle for the presentation of research results, but also a site for ongoing research around the formats and concerns of the exhibition,” “a place for enacted research.”¹⁸ Related to the notion of the research exhibition, artistic research has emerged as a main, if loosely

defined field in contemporary art, covering the theoretical and academic awareness of the artists as well as the art work as producer of knowledge.¹⁹ In the PhD thesis *Acts of Research* (2014) Sidsel Nelund approaches this field, noting the alternative positioning compared to the increasingly neoliberal educational system, but also a complex and overlapping relationship and even an institutionalization of artistic research when promoted at events like DOCUMENTA 13 (2012).

Obviously the research exhibition is associated with experimental exhibition sites and curators: a category to which the HKW is easily identified as an event and exhibition venue where the international and interdisciplinary is highlighted in *projects* rather than conventional exhibitions of artists and art works. HKW has hosted a series of projects appointing current developments and discourses, like *The Anthropocene Project* (2013–2014) with the aim to perform “Basic cultural research using the means of art and science”²⁰ and “essay exhibitions” (so named by curator Anselm Franke) that appoint a general theme through a specific phenomenon. *After Year Zero* is such an essay exhibition/project with the Bandung conference as starting point for the general theme of postwar post-colonialism and alternative modernities. The combination of material including art works, documentary films, and archive material—together with a reader-like catalogue—easily forms “a place for enacted research,” where the processual and searching, rather than a perfected presentation of results, is the goal, actively embedded in the exhibition through the aforementioned workshops.

Concerning this staging of research, it is a question to which degree the research of the curators overlap with the research-like quality of many of the artworks. These often have a very similar intention of gathering archive material and discuss the means of representing it and appoint the theme of the exhibition, like in the work of the Otolith Group or the lengthy documentary films. The contributions of the artists and the curatorial staging have a tendency to flow into each other, or at least treat very common ground, and blur the distinction between the documentary and the artistic renditions: One documentary video is a straight presentation of historical material, the other an artist’s depiction. This could however

be justified through a common interest and the collective process of the exhibition, but arguably has consequences for the readability of the exhibition and its communicative ability: *After Year Zero* appeared as rather demanding and complex. The approach to the subject, the treatment of it, and the conclusive perspective was rather overlapping and it was hard to deduce any significant *meaning* of the exhibition, despite its committed, memory–political agenda: what was the effect of the Bandung conference and the other attempts to form a non-alignment modernity? What does it mean today?

Arguably there is a conflict between the forms of the *research exhibition* and the *essay exhibition*: the research exhibition must aim at some kind of methodology and be a place for enacting research, while the essay is a more free form, based on the author’s subjective voice. These interfere in *After Year Zero* that indeed opens for the topic of Bandung and a global postwar history, but do not leave the level of just proclaiming this interest as an exhibition. Despite the memory activist aims of the project, the exhibition stays at the introducing, open level and does not produce a synthesis of its gathered material.

To summarize, the exhibition asserts the theme of *multiple modernities*, also beyond the arts. It provides a critical attention to the presence of the *color curtain* in the postwar culture, while also stressing the attempts to form and define a modern identity in different cultural practices. However, it also carried difficulties in the form and the treatment of the material. The locations of the exhibition should also be noted: Haus der Kulturen der Welt is an emblematic building of West Berlin, built as Kongresshalle in 1957 as a gift from the United States as a visible symbol of Western values at the ruins of the German “Stunde Null,” a few hundred meters from Brandenburger Tor and the Berlin Wall (there was a hill erected to make the expressively modern building visible to the other side). Since the 1980s its present role as house of world culture has included a special configuration of international contemporary art and “current development and discourse.” This is a remarkable meeting of the contemporary and the postwar modern, making the building an obvious site for discussions of the heritage of the post1945-world and its global structures: A site-specific dimension

to the theme, that could have been explored more in the exhibition. The Warsaw edition took place in the temporary building of Museum of Modern Art and did neither include much of the site-specific perspective as situated in a former communist country in a city marked by its own devastated Year Zero, with the exception of Lukasz Stanek's documentation of Polish architects work in Ghana in the 1960s.

The World Goes Pop—rewriting art history through the blockbuster?

Where *After Year Zero* was situated in contexts central in curatorial and artistic discourses, but not oriented towards a large audience with the communicative and marketing dependencies this would demand, the situation is different for a major temporary exhibition at Tate Modern: Britain's national gallery of modern art and one of the World's most visited art institutions with 5 million visitors each year.²¹ Every presentation here will inscribe itself in the blockbuster category of audience-oriented, heavily promoted, supposedly best-selling shows, and must be result-oriented and not indifferent to issues of impact and visibility. *The World Goes Pop* was shown at Tate Modern in 2015–16, sponsored by the multinational service company Ernst & Young and presented as The EY Exhibition. The subject was however far from conventional blockbuster material with barely any artists known in the general public and a focus on, from the view of canonical art history, “minor” manifestations of a historical movement, even from a wide array of nations far from the bestselling West. The aim of *The World Goes Pop* was to “tell a global story of pop art,” “from Latin America to Asia, and from Europe to the Middle East” with an emphasis on the new reading of an iconic movement (“This is pop art, but not as you know it,” “breaking new ground [...] and revealing a different side to the artistic and cultural phenomenon”²²) and the necessity to do so to get a more adequate understanding of pop art and its cultural context. Thus, it was an attempt to rewrite art history through the large-scale exhibition and reassess the postwar era, very much in a multiple modernities discourse with its global focus: pop was not just exported worldwide, but also created and formed in multiple contexts.



Exhibition view with work of Gerard Fromager. Courtesy of Tate Photography.

The World Goes Pop comprised of around 160 works from the 1960s and 1970s, displayed in 10 themed rooms. It was an artwork-centered exhibition showing just these works with brightly colored walls miming the “pop palette” as the only aesthetical staging. A thorough track of accompanying text went through the exhibition, presenting the themes of the rooms as well as each of the individual works. The themed structure did not group the artists geographically and deliberately mixed Japanese video art with Brazilian installations and Belgian collages in themes like *Pop Politics*, *Pop Bodies*, and *Pop Crowd*. This suggested a thesis of common ground and shared experience of modernity, like the advent of consumer culture, far beyond the West in the era. In an essay appearing in *Art Forum* in advance of the exhibition in 2013 and in an edited form as curatorial presentation in the exhibition catalogue curator Jessica Morgan describes the generalities and specificities of “global pop.” At one hand Morgan refers to a general experience of “an unprecedented aesthetic challenge” of advertising and commercial visual culture in the beginning of the 1960s, that was, if “branded quintessentially American,” “in fact indelibly global.”²³ Pop was a “post-readymade but pre-simulacrum” representation of modern material and media culture responding to a specific and crucial moment. Yet Morgan also underscores the diversity in pop and its multifarious contexts not forming any organized network or movement, but “singular forms and designations [...] in no singular language.”²⁴ As Morgan convincingly points out, the singular “All-American” image of pop was to a large extent

a product of an instant musealization through exhibitions and books in the 1960s as in an echo of the network of critics, markets and exhibitions that established Abstract Expressionism—pop’s immediate contrast. Here it is the task of the exhibition to represent the alternative pops and to show that these do form a consistent addition to the image.

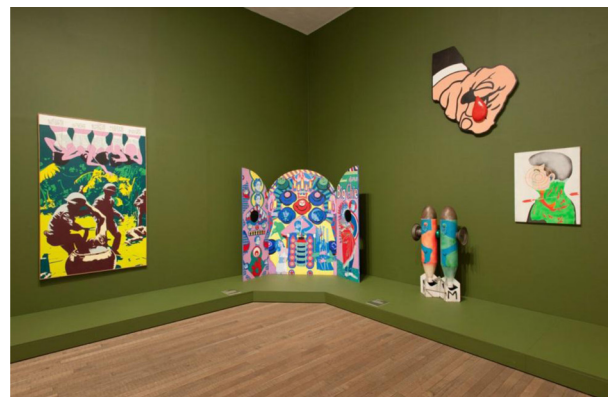
A central characteristic says that “Global Pop deformed, extended, or inverted certain strategies of American Pop – and developed wholly different tactics – in dialogue with specifically vernacular consumer environments.”²⁵ This emphasizes the interplay between America and local contexts, both concerning pop art and culture in general. It also involves an understanding of modern culture as happening through translations, imports, and local versioning rather than one-directional production of culture. Initially, many of the works are focused on a critique of American dominance in cultural as well as political power, like Icelandic Erró’s paintings of guerilla invasions in the American dream home in the series *American Interior* or Japanese Keiichi Tanaami’s animated film *Commercial War*. In hindsight, the works themselves seems to testify to a more compound image, where the event of becoming modern is multiple and not singular: for instance in the rebus of Japanese and Western references in Ushio Shinohara: *Doll Festival*—or in the fact of where the inspirational images for Erró’s series were actually found: the American interiors in communist Cuba and the revolutionary posters in Paris!



Ushio Shinohara: *Doll Festival*, 1966, Fluorescent paint, oil, plastic board on plywood, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (Yamamura Collection) © Ushio and Noriko Shinohara.

Besides the sheer geographical perspective, *The World Goes Pop* gives a new focus to the critical

stance of pop, be it in national and international politics, gender roles, or anti-commercialism. With the engaged content of the majority of the works, from Japanese anti-Vietnam war machine sculptures by Shinkichi Tajiri to Henri Cueco’s post-1968 revolutionary crowd sculptures and flowing red flags, the label of the show could have been “Radical Pop” as well. The non-comment stance of the classic American pop art of Andy Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein is taken over by various degrees of committed commentary using the direct language of pop in a subversive way. This may seem like a misunderstanding distancing the outcomes from the essential characteristic of the American pop art, similar to the way the Japanese Gutai group interpreted action painting as performative body art in the 1950s. The *other pop* of *The World Goes Pop* is no doubt much more closely in the cultural, social, and political fabric of the sixties—far beyond the supermarket sphere of classic pop.



Exhibition view. Courtesy of Tate Photography.

The global pop of the exhibition notably dates from a slightly later timespan than the classic American pop art, which is associated with the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s (Hal Foster sets the first age of pop art as the mid to late 1950s in his recent account *The First Pop Age* (2012)).²⁶ The dates of the works of the exhibition are clustered in the late 1960s with quite a few running up through the 1970s, forming the decade from 1965 to 1975 as the “global pop era.” In the catalogue, co-curator Flavia Frigeri’s essay *1966 in the World of Pop* uses the year 1966 as a “way to enter the labyrinthine world of pop” and “a device to uncover relationships and discrepancies

across pop hemispheres.²⁷ In 1966 the American Pop had been exhibited in Europe and elsewhere (it was given a prominent spot at the Venice Biennale in 1964 where the Grand Prize was awarded to Robert Rauschenberg, for instance) and could thus generate responses in a climate of new opportunities and horizons, from the rocket roars of the space race to the burgeoning counter culture. This starting point ties pop art even closer to the commonly perceived and collectively remembered *Sixties* and their emblematic Summer of Love of 1967 and revolutionary zenith of 1968. “1968”-Pop Art could be seen as forming a substantial category of the exhibition with themes such as protest, revolt, and the iconography of the counter culture. Some works are even directly derived from the events of the 68 movement in Europe, like Gerard Fromanger: *Album. The Red* (1968–1970), where the red color flows out of images of protests and flags, and Evelyne Axell: *The Pretty Month of May* (1970) depicting a naked protest sit-in in Brussels.

These reactions to the Western “68” are somewhat casually mixed with works referring to other contexts struggles in the era. For instance, the Brazilian works stems from a context of military dictatorship after the coupe of 1964 and beyond the Iron Curtain the meaning of revolution and visual language in public space was of course different, to which Joseph Jankovic responds with *Private Manifestation* (1968): a poster for a demonstration with a self-portrait as a disobedient sign of individuality. The exhibition tries to span a lot here, and again the works are not grouped geographically, but mixed, and juxtaposes the different contexts and artistic responses to them. A risqué of simplification or misunderstanding might be pointed out—in another way than the well-known American pop art, or even its Western European versions, these works reflect different backgrounds and, supposedly, different institutional contexts for the work of art. If American Pop was presented in and responding to being presented in an established gallery and museum scene, this is hardly the case of many of these works. The “poster work” of the exhibition, Shinohara’s *Doll Festival*, is one of few of the artist’s works preserved, because there was little demand or recognition for Japanese pop art in the 1960s. One can imagine even more difficult circumstances, where Pop and other Western styles were actively censored, as, to various

degrees, in the communist countries. Here the pop works were absolutely not created for the official art institution and public display, and must have worked as secret underground art in contrast to the “pop” imagery. And how about the context the Brazilian pop, which happened as a struggling response to the military dictatorship? These important contexts are to a certain degree treated in the catalogue, including essays on Brazilian pop and “Pop Effects in Eastern Europe under Communist Rule.” However, seen at the exhibition, the impression of unlimited access and possibilities of creation of pop art works, dealing with all kinds of matter, could settle. As the aim of the exhibition is to correct former omissions and present different sides of pop art in accordance with contemporary art historical research, the topic of the exhibition and institution history of global pop could have been more explored, which would have set the exhibition itself in perspective. Despite the pop-colored walls the exhibition sticks to the white cube model of a neutral presentation of important works in a cleaned space.

The academic conference that anticipated the exhibition and a long list of advisors and collaborators underscores the meticulous research in the exhibition, and could obviously qualify it as a “research-based exhibition” in an immediate sense. As a blockbuster exhibition it is of course result-oriented, presenting an authoritative survey of works, rather than a process or being a “site for research” itself, like the research exhibition aims at. The curator’s agenda and the perspective of today are hidden beneath the presence of the original works. It is still an active choice to realize the exhibition now—undoubtedly an experimental and, in terms of audience figures, risqué-taking choice for the museum. The Tate organization has in recent years introduced a strategy towards a global focus to reorient the national gallery towards world-awareness with a structure of regional advisory boards. *The World Goes Pop* obviously fits into this strategy and arguably pioneers the global reassessment of post-1945 art in large-scale institutions for a wide audience.

Conclusion: remodeling the modern

After Year Zero and *The World Goes Pop* are important manifestations of a growing field of dedicated reassessments of postwar arts and culture

in a global perspective. Both exhibitions show how “modernist attitudes took shape in different national and cultural environments” in a “dynamic interplay between different cultures,” to quote Mercer, breaking with the conventional center–periphery perspective and nationally oriented art histories. With this agenda, the museal and curatorial efforts clearly coincide with academic art historical studies, where modernism and other fields of art’s newer history are approached in a *multiple modernities* perspective. It should be noted that these efforts form a loosely delimited field, not being defined by a shared theory, ideology, or activist agenda, like the cultural studies or post-colonial studies. The conditions in the historical era in question are contested and debated: some studies are focused on the possibilities for modern art in local, non-Western context to flourish, while other on the obstacles and structural repression, also in modernist aesthetics themselves. The two analyzed exhibitions show this difference: *The World Goes Pop* gives the impression of the worldwide spread of pop art and its ability to treat a number of critical themes: political power, imperialism, gender, sex, consumerism, etc., forming an affirmative and positive image of the art in question and its possibilities through the exhibition of the historical artworks in themselves. On the contrary, *After Year Zero* takes the oppression of the color curtain as its starting point and does not focus on art works of the era, but other kinds of material from political, social and other cultural spheres, more or less artistically presented. *After Year Zero* portrays an ambiguity in the becoming-modern of the post-1945 world: at the one hand, oppressive structures remained and was even embedded in modern aesthetics, on the other hand, signs of resistance and independence showed up in modern culture forms, as displayed through the exhibition. These stances could be seen as symptomatic of the institutions presenting the exhibitions: the large, audience-oriented museum presents a relatively positive, even entertaining version, while the more insider-oriented research-exhibition offers a demanding, conflictual and critical version. However, the exhibitions may also offer different contributions to the debate, answering to positions like Moxey and Mercer: *After Year Zero* seems to support Moxey’s view of the hegemonic, Western nature of modernism, where ideas of progress and modernization is tied together

with Western self-understanding of superiority, while *The World Goes Pop* fits with Mercer’s hybrid modernism, where a phenomenon like pop art from the beginning was translated between cultures and reflected the visual culture of global modernities and “the vernacular dialects of the postcolonial condition.”²⁸

There are indeed differences in approach, form and content. Also between an art-historical exhibition showing historical art works from the 1960s as *The World Goes Pop*, and an assembly of texts, documents, films and staging of archive material forming *After Year Zero*. As this article has argued, both are part of a movement towards investigation of post-1945 modernity. This investigation is remarkably thorough and committed, making the exhibitions important contributions to the critical and scholarly debate concerning a more just world understanding. The analysis reveals different problems effecting the curatorial aim in the exhibition and how to represent the complex context and show generalities as well as specificities.

Notes

1. This concept is used by Dag Solhjell in *Formidler og formidlet. En teori om kunstformidlingens praksis*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001.
2. Video documented online at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/global-pop-symposium-day-1> (accessed December 20th 2015)
3. I have analyzed retro culture as a cultural memory of the postwar era in Handberg (2014).
4. Mercer, Kobena, ed. *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers (Annotating Art’s Histories)*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008, 7.
5. Mercer, Kobena, ed. *Cosmopolitan Modernisms (Annotating Art’s Histories)*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005, 8.
6. Ibid.
7. The concept is introduced by Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities.” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000), pp. 1–29.
8. (Wagner), Peter. *Modernity. Understanding the Present*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, 6.
9. Mercer. *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 8.
10. Moxey, Keith. *Visual Time: The Image in History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 11.
11. Ibid., 17.
12. (Sandbrook), Dominic. *Never Had It So Good. A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*. London: Abacus, 2005.
13. Enwezor, Okwui. “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Flux.”

- Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (Winter, 2003): 57–82, 68.
14. *After year Zero. Exhibition Catalogue*. Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2015, 17.
15. *Ibid.*, 15.
16. *Ibid.*, 22.
17. Sheikh, Simon. “Towards the Exhibition as Research.” In *Curating Research*, ed. O’Neill, Paul, & Wilson, Mick. Amsterdam, New York: Open Editions, 2014, 33.
18. *Ibid.*, 40.
19. Nelund, Sidsel. “Acts of Research.” PhD thesis, The University of Copenhagen, 2014, 143.
20. https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/anthropozaen/anthropozaen_2013_2014.php (accessed December 20th 2015).
21. Tate Report 2013/2014 <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/44097> (accessed 20th December 2015).
22. Presentation at Tate website, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop> (accessed 20th December 2015).
23. Morgan, Jessica. *Intercontinental Drift*. New York: Art Forum. (2013), 223–229.
24. Morgan. *Intercontinental*, 224.
25. Morgan. *Intercontinental*, 226.
26. Foster, Hal. *The First Pop Age*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012, 4.
27. Frigeri, Flavia. “1966 in the World of Pop.” In *The World Goes Pop (Exhibition Catalogue)*. London: Tate Publishing, 2015, 43.
28. Mercer, Kobena, ed. *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures (Annotating Art’s Histories)*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007, 8.

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Exhibitions:

- After Year Zero* (curated by Anselm Franke and Annett Busch) Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 19.9.–24.11. 2013 (http://www.hkw.de/de/programm/projekte/2013/after_year_zero/start_after_year_zero.php) and Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 12.6.–23.8. 2015 (<http://artmuseum.pl/en/wystawy/after-year-zero>)
- The World Goes Pop* (curated by Jessica Morgan and Flavia Frigeri). Tate Modern, London, 17.9. 2015–24.1. 2016 (<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop>)